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## TIPS FOR EVALUATING YOUR FINANCIAL PLANNING RELATIONSHIP

BY ADAM WAITKEVICH, CFP®, AIF®, CDFA™

## Wealth Planning Is **About You**

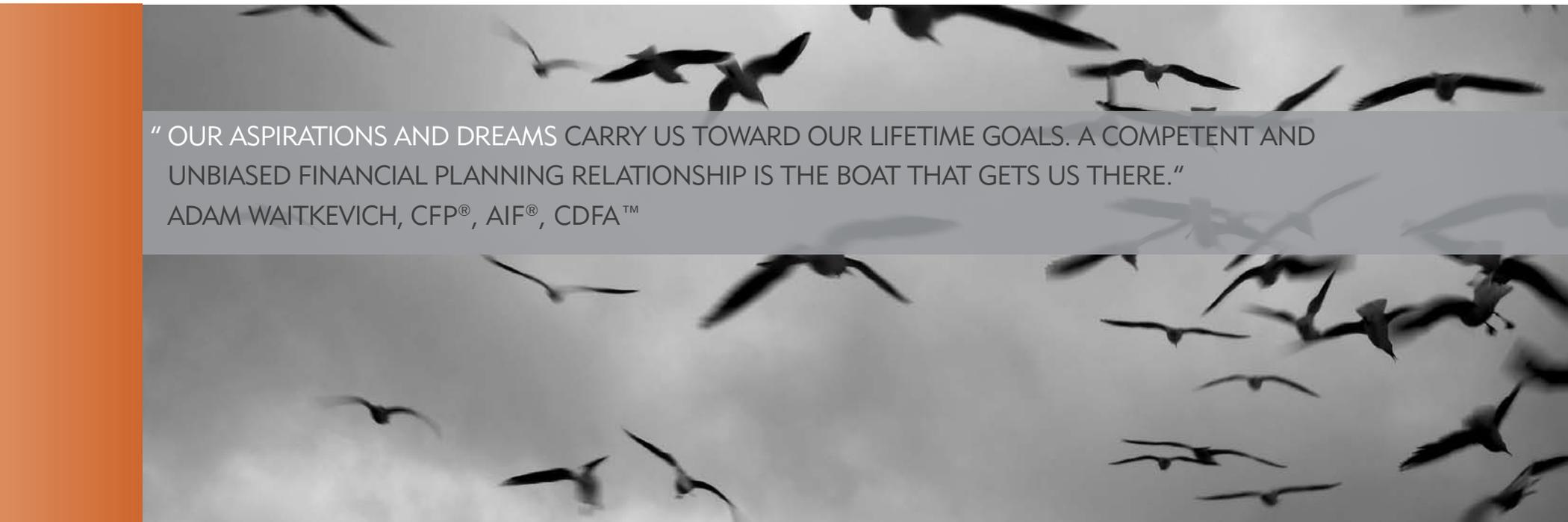
For most of us money is a loyal servant, but a difficult master. We begin adulthood by buying our own insurance and saving our own money. As we mature personally and grow professionally, our lives and financial situation become more complicated.

## Doing It Yourself — **Or Working with a Professional**

With different priorities competing for attention, it's clear some planning is needed to straighten things out. Some personal finance software packages, magazines or self-help books can provide you with enough background to manage your financial situation as a "do-it-yourselfer" perhaps for quite a while. Some people continue on for the rest of their lives managing their own finances. Others experience a time when software, books and a filing system isn't enough — and hire a professional financial planner.

## How Effective Is **Your Current Financial Planning Relationship?**

It's about your hopes, dreams and plans — your own personal design for living — that rounded sense that all of the financial elements in your life are moving in the same direction at the same time: That the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. However, even after you choose a professional, time may pass before you realize that certain expectations are not being met. Is it time for a change? These six tips can help you evaluate your current relationship to determine if your goals are being reached.



" OUR ASPIRATIONS AND DREAMS CARRY US TOWARD OUR LIFETIME GOALS. A COMPETENT AND UNBIASED FINANCIAL PLANNING RELATIONSHIP IS THE BOAT THAT GETS US THERE."

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# 1

## Look beyond short-term performance and toward the bigger picture

The average investor can become laser-focused on one issue and one issue only: "Maximizing Returns." While performance is important, it is only one element in a well-rounded plan. Even the most astute investors fail to truly understand the many different risks that relate to their investment choices. If your advisor is spending the bulk of his time shifting in and out of "top managers and funds," how much time is being spent on aligning your overall financial strategy to your specific life goals? Don't let investment performance undermine and overshadow your other financial and fiduciary needs.

# 2

## Are you receiving the information you need to be a smarter investor?

The complexity of personal finance can lead to frustration, complacency and a lack of planning. Today's top financial advisors act as true advocates for their clients and empower them with refreshingly honest advice and guidance. Which is your advisor's priority? Being your advocate — or ensuring a steady stream of commissions for themselves?

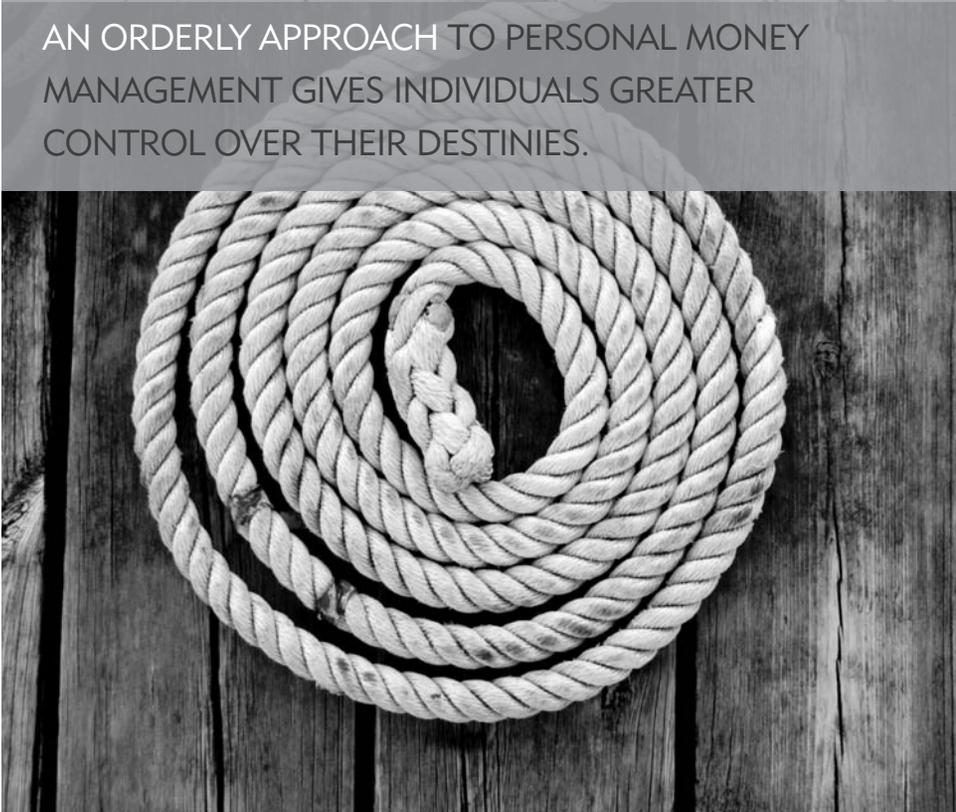
# 3

## Know your advisor's designated level of competence — "Trustworthy does not always = competent"

Sadly, the barrier to entry into the financial planning profession is far too low. This makes it more challenging for the average consumer to find a competent advisor. The large number of ambiguous and confusing financial designations available can create the perception of competence where none has been earned. At a minimum, consumers should limit their search to financial planners that hold the CFP® designation. Additionally, be sure your financial professional is continually advancing her knowledge within this ever-changing industry. Has your current advisor demonstrated a dedication to acquiring greater financial planning skills?



A GOOD ADVISOR CAN HELP STEER YOU AWAY FROM EMOTION-BASED INVESTING AND TOWARD A PROCESS AND GOAL-DRIVEN APPROACH.



AN ORDERLY APPROACH TO PERSONAL MONEY MANAGEMENT GIVES INDIVIDUALS GREATER CONTROL OVER THEIR DESTINIES.

# 4

## How much are you really paying?

Few advisors and even fewer consumers take the time to truly understand the total costs of investment decisions. The tendency instead is to focus on only the visible and explicit costs of investing, while remaining in the dark about the hidden fees inherent in many investment vehicles. If you don't have a transparent view of all the costs and fees associated with your current relationship, you are likely giving away your hard-earned wealth.

# 5

## Are you confident about your investment process?

Not having a long-term plan or a sound investment philosophy can make investing through turbulent times even more challenging. Would you describe your current process as proactive or reactive? Does your investment professional have a sensible and academically sound investment philosophy to help guide you through good and bad markets? A good financial planner will have a solid investment philosophy supported by empirical research and an understanding of market efficiency.

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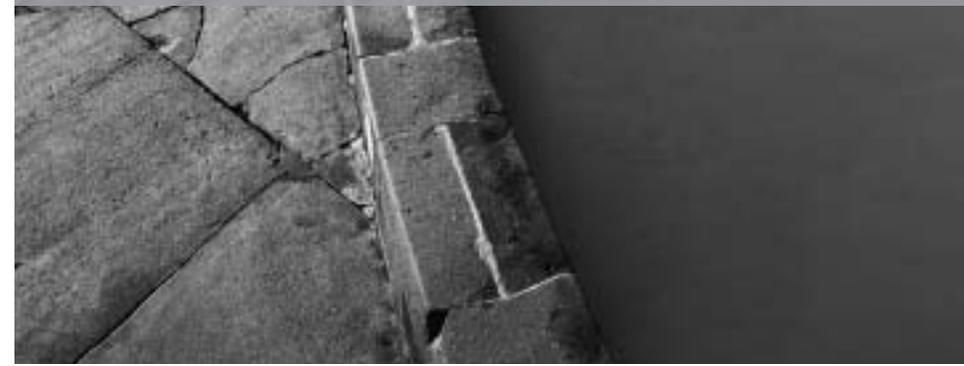
## There is no "one-size-fits-all" solution

You may not want all of your assets to be transferred to one professional. If so, consider firms that provide you with a number of options to pay for the services you need, as well as a way to work with other professionals as part of a team. More flexible client advocates not only work with others, they provide services on a fee-only basis, hourly consulting — or some combination of both.

Competent advice — your way — should be easy to access.



YOUR PERSONAL FINANCIAL PLAN SHOULD  
ALIGN ENTIRELY WITH YOUR UNIQUE GOALS  
AND ASPIRATIONS.



## Learn More About Wealth Planning

Wealth planning incorporates a consultative approach to financial planning that accounts for the interrelation between tax, estate, investment and lifestyle goals in a holistic, fiduciary manner. Wealth planning is process-driven and not transactional or commission focused. It involves careful listening and understanding of goals. When done properly, it will help simplify and align your entire financial enterprise with the goals and dreams that are unique to you.

## Why a Fee-Only Financial Planner Is The Best Choice

Since they are not influenced by any affiliations to a particular fund or product, fee-only planners offer the most transparent and conflict-free avenue to guidance and planning. If you are concerned that the advice you receive may be based on commission or incentives rather than your specific needs, it may be a good time to consider a fee-only planning firm.

## The services offered at Stone Harbor Trust

OFFERING	BENEFIT
Comprehensive Wealth Management	Personalized and holistic financial, tax and estate planning solutions
Financial Planning	Goal, event or task-specific planning services designed to maximize probability of success relative to given resources and timeframe
Philanthropic Planning	Comprehensive and tax-conscious gifting solutions designed to maximize value gifted to both donor and recipients
Investment Management	Passive, low-cost and academically proven investment philosophy designed to identify and regulate exposure to the compensating elements of global equity markets while controlling for risk.
Retirement Solutions	Tax and cost-efficient solutions for family and corporate (ERISA) clients; emphasis and acknowledgement of fiduciary duties and responsibilities.
Endowment Solutions	Full service investment advice and guidance including: development and review of Investment Policy, portfolio efficiency modeling as well as detailed cost analysis and reporting for trustees and other fiduciaries.